Church Principles For Lay People

The Apostles' Creed Today

Edward S. Drown

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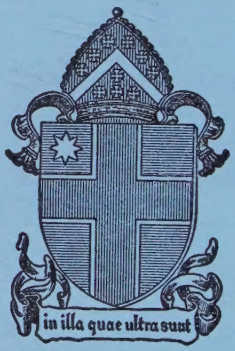

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THE APOSTLES' CREED TO-DAY

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TORONTO

THE APOSTLES' CREED TO-DAY

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New York

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1917

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I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell; The third day he rose again from the dead: He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty: From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost: The holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints: The Forgiveness of sins: The Resurrection of the body: And the Life everlasting. Amen.

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CREEDS AND LIBERTY

THE APOSTLES' CREED TO-DAY

I

CREEDS AND LIBERTY

IS a creed a restraint on religious liberty? So it is often maintained. Creeds are regarded as shackles, fetters on freedom. It is held that the road to freedom is through the abolition of creeds.

If creeds are really fetters on freedom, modern men can have no interest in creeds. We demand liberty; liberty of thought and of life, liberty in the state, industrial liberty — above all, liberty of conscience in all things that pertain to our relation with God. The fight for liberty is the fight of the modern world. With a great price purchased we this freedom, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed. If religion is to keep its place in the modern world, it must not merely tolerate the demand for liberty

— it must insist upon it. For no freedom is perfectly secured unless it is founded on religious freedom — the freedom of man's relation with God.

If then creeds are a shackle on freedom, creeds cannot permanently be maintained. They must be defended, if at all, in no faint-hearted, apologetic way. It will not be enough to prove that their restraints on freedom are not very serious. The issue must be more boldly faced. Creeds must be shown to be guarantees of liberty. It must be shown that their abolition would conduce to bondage rather than to freedom. Only such a contention can vindicate the rightful place for creeds. A half-hearted defence must be abandoned for a bold attack.

I

For this purpose it is necessary to examine the idea of freedom in some of its varied spheres. Take, first, the age long controversy as to the freedom of the will. It has sometimes been thought that if a man is free he must be free to will anything. A bad man is free at once to become a saint, and a saint

to become a villain. A loving mother is free to feed her baby or to let it starve. Freedom of the will means freedom to act in any way that is logically possible.

Such a theory is so radically untrue to fact that it must produce reaction. If that be freedom, then there is no freedom. The will is plainly limited. Determinism will have the best of the battle against any such idea of arbitrary freedom.

The fact is that freedom cannot be separated from a right relation to one's environment. Freedom and experience go hand in hand. On the one hand, man is not a thing. He is not the mere sport of outward circumstance. He can become the master and not the slave of his own nature and of his environment. On the other hand, he can attain such free mastery only as he grasps the truth of his own nature and of the environment in which he is placed. Freedom is a growth, and it grows only through knowledge of the truth and obedience to that truth. If a man's will acts arbitrarily, without relation to his own nature and to his circumstances, then his will enslaves him instead of

freeing him. A man lost in the woods can go any way that he likes. But by that very fact he cannot escape from them. He finds a path, and in following it he wins his freedom. A ship at sea without chart or compass is the sport of accident. Chart and compass reveal its true position and open up freedom to reach the desired haven. Free control over nature comes only through knowledge of and obedience to the laws of nature. As scientific knowledge of nature increases, scientific control over nature grows by leaps and bounds, and man's free control of nature grows apace. Freedom consists always in a relation to the truth. Only by knowledge of truth can man's will be set free from bondage to his environment. By obedience to law he becomes master instead of slave.

All this is just as true of political freedom. Political freedom does not come at the beginning of history. It is an end to be achieved, and to be achieved only as right relations are developed between man and man. The free savage is a figment of the imagination. He is bound by traditions, customs, the hard ne-

cessities of life. Thomas Hobbes was perfectly right in maintaining that a state without law was a state where every man was deprived of his rights. Anarchy is but another name for tyranny. The individual citizen becomes free as the community establishes itself in law and order. Laws that truly express the constitution of society at the same time secure the freedom of the citizen. Laws guard and protect that freedom. Covenants are signed that it may be defended. Magna Charta guarded the rights of men. When the men on the Mayflower put their names to that compact, did they sign away their freedom or secure it? When the Declaration of Independence was signed was that signature an act of slavery? When the Constitution of the United States brought order out of confusion and light out of darkness did it impose slavery or liberty upon the nation?

Freedom of the will goes hand in hand with the discovery of truth. Freedom in the State goes hand in hand with the growth of law.

Of course the law must be true law; that

is, it must be law that rightly expresses the nature of the community and the relation to each other of its citizens. When law distorts those relations, then law becomes tyranny. But the escape from tyranny is not through the abolition of law, but through its reformation. Anarchy is the opposite of freedom. Freedom exists in proportion as the community has come to a true realisation of itself, and has expressed itself in true laws. Freedom consists in right relation to law.

These principles are equally true of that freedom which to-day is still so far to seek, industrial freedom. Some men are to-day industrially the slaves of other men, or are the slaves of our modern economic structure, a structure which has grown with great rapidity, and whose laws are as yet very imperfectly understood. There are men of strong bodies, of good minds, of ready wills, who yet are unable to secure for themselves and their families the reasonable requirements of decent living. Rich and poor alike, even with the best desires, are unable to break away from that vicious circle in which the pros-

perity of one is the poverty of others. How is that desired freedom to be won?

Only by a deeper knowledge of the social structure and of its economic laws. Mere charity, in the ordinary sense, is only a palliative. The demand for justice is a demand for a knowledge of the truth, for a deeper knowledge of the laws that express the true relations between men and men, and between men and money. No scheme can stand that is not the outcome of a searching knowledge of the truth. Only through such knowledge can we establish the free commonwealth, in which the good of one shall be the good of all.

In every case freedom comes only through the truth. Whether we are speaking of freedom of the will, of political freedom, or of industrial freedom, in any case we are free only by being put into true relations with our fellowmen.

II

Such considerations should cast light on the character of religious freedom and on its relation to creeds. Religious freedom con-

sists in a man's ability to express himself truly in his relation to God and to his fellows. Alike to God and to his fellows. For religion is never a matter of relation to God alone. It is also a matter of human fellowship brought about by that relation, real or supposed, to God. From its beginnings religion has been a social rather than a purely individual matter. Religion began not with the individual, but with the tribe or clan or family. And as religion developed it has always been a means through which men were knit together by a common belief in their common relation to God. Even in its most individualistic forms religion has always offered a basis for some fellowship, even although that fellowship may have been conceived in most narrow terms, the admission into a small coterie of those who are initiated into a common access to the divine. The relation to God, or to a god, has always been regarded as opening up something of a common relation among men.

All this is supremely true of Christianity. Nothing is more distinctively true of the Christian gospel than that it reveals a rela-

tion with God which is at the same time a fellowship among men. Jesus exalts the individual life, in that He reveals the divine sonship of man and his relation to his heavenly Father. But the first word of His preaching is the Kingdom of God, and that is a social concept, that of human life under the rule of God. The divine sonship that Jesus revealed can never be separated from, must indeed be expressed in, the life of neighbourhood. The two great commandments, " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," and " Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," cannot be separated. They are but different sides of the gospel of the divine Fatherhood.

This union of the individual and the social runs through the whole New Testament from cover to cover. The Apostle Paul opens up the richness of the individual life, created through its surrender to God. The doctrine of justification by faith puts man in direct relation to God through Christ, exalts the individual, and establishes the supremacy of the individual conscience. But, it has been well said, to St. Paul the primal mystery of the

gospel was the mystery of human unity, the overcoming of all outward marks that separate man from man, the discovery of the stupendous fact that there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all. St. John is sometimes called the mystic of the New Testament. And the mystic is often supposed to be one who in immediate contact with the life of God is separated from the world and from the life of men. Yet St. John says in the plainest words, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." The love of God is not a reality unless it expresses itself in the life of men. To the whole New Testament the fellowship with God is also a fellowship with the children of God.

Later Christianity has had many faults and aberrations, but it has never utterly lost that ideal. It lies at the very heart of the belief in the Church. For the Church, rightly taken, stands for the ideal of a fellowship among men that is rooted and grounded on fellowship with God. In the deepest sense all Christian life is life in the

Church, that is in fellowship. Take the word Church in no narrow or sectarian interpretation, and the old saying, so often misused, becomes true in the deepest sense, "There is no salvation outside of the Church." For the heart of that saying is that there can be no fellowship with God unless it is realised through fellowship with men, that the love of God means love of the brethren.

This brings us back to the statement that religious freedom consists in a man's ability to express himself truly in his relation to God and to his fellows. What bearing on such liberty has a creed?

III

It is necessary to distinguish carefully between a creed as such and an underlying theology or philosophy. Every religion has something corresponding to a theology, but not every religion has a creed in a distinctive sense. A creed properly taken embraces such elements of religious belief as are regarded as vital to the religious fellowship. In this sense it can hardly be said that the

ancient religions of Greece or Rome had a creed. They had a theology, a general complex of religious and philosophical ideas, which were held more or less in common. But this complex of ideas was not regarded as a badge of fellowship. The mark of fellowship lay rather in the ritual, and he who performed the ritual was admitted to free religious fellowship without any question as to his belief. That belief was practically a matter of free discussion by the philosophers. Probably the same thing can be said in general of the religions of India. There was underlying them an immense mass of theology or philosophy. But questions as to such theology were apparently free, and it is probable that no mere difference of opinion could have produced religious alienation. There may be a partial exception in Buddhism, whose conception of the Way or the Path may be considered as a sort of creed or common basis of thought leading to fellowship.

But one thing is clear. There are certain religions in which a positive definite creed emerges, and in which acceptance of that creed is regarded as vital to the fellowship of

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that religion. The religion of Israel had such a creed. It finds definite expression as follows: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thy house, and upon thy gates." [1] The acceptance of the Lord as God becomes a creed, a badge of fellowship.

Mohammedanism has its creed. "There is no God except Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." Under that creed the body of the faithful form a fellowship. Something of the same kind can be said of the ancient Persian religion of Zarathustra or Zoroaster.

[1] Deut. 6:4–9.

Allegiance to the God of light against the power of darkness became a badge of fellowship. In all these cases we have not merely an underlying theology, but we have certain fundamental ideas expressing allegiance to a common God. And that allegiance and the beliefs that went with it become a pledge of a common fellowship.

All these religions are distinctly fighting religions. Each one is concerned with its own truth as vital. Each is in a sense an intolerant religion, that is it regards its own truth as a thing to be fought for. There is a great difference between such religions and the easy going tolerance of Greece and Rome, a tolerance that rested not upon a conviction of the rights of conscience, the only true basis for toleration, but upon an indifference to truth, or at least upon the suspicion that all ideas are in some way equally true. But these fighting religions have had aggressive power, they have had a distinctly missionary element. For, realising that religion implies truth, they could not be indifferent to truth and to its propagation.

Now the Christian religion had a creed

from very early times. Not, of course, a formal creed. That came later. But in the New Testament it is perfectly clear that the early Christians were knit together in a common allegiance to their Lord, and that that allegiance was expressed in an elementary creedal form. The heart of this was the confession of Jesus as Lord and Christ. Perhaps its earliest form was that Jesus was the Christ, or more strictly that the Christ was Jesus. There is given no single form of words, but the importance of such a fundamental confession of faith in Christ is clearly seen. The following passages will serve as examples: "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven." [1] "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." [2] "That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ

[1] Matt. 10:32, cf. Luke 12:8.
[2] Rom. 10: 9–10.

is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." [1] "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him and he in God." [2] And the following passage is very probably a quotation from an early hymn or confession of faith: "He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory." [3] These passages sufficiently indicate the fundamental confession of Christ which lay at the basis of the Christian fellowship.

A creed then is primarily an expression of religious allegiance and a badge of religious fellowship. It is not first a mere theology, a mere collection of dogmas or beliefs. It is primarily an expression of faith or belief, belief taken in a personal rather than in an intellectual sense, belief conceived of as trust or allegiance. It carries with it, of course, intellectual contents. But those intellectual contents are but the expression of a fundamental act of trust.

[1] Phil. 2:11.
[2] I John 4:15. Cf. I John 4:2–3, and II John, verse 7.
[3] I Tim. 3:16.

IV

Now is such a creed enslaving? Yes, if the path through the woods is enslaving to the man who is lost. Yes, if the map and compass are enslaving to the ship at sea. Yes, if the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are shackles on liberty. But if path and compass and map and constitution are means to secure liberty, and to escape from slavery, then may not a creed expressing a common allegiance serve the same purpose? If religious fellowship rests upon such common allegiance and upon the truth that that allegiance implies, then a creed expressing that allegiance and that truth is not a badge of slavery but of freedom.

It is an easy supposition that the abolition of all creeds would make for religious, for Christian, freedom. The question as to how the abolition of the Apostles' Creed would affect freedom can be discussed only after we have considered the character of that creed. Here the question concerns creeds in general. And there is no more reason to suppose that

the abolition of all creeds would make for liberty in the Church any more than the abolition of constitutions and laws would make for liberty in the State. If men were only isolated individuals they would need no constitutions, no laws, and no creeds. But if men find their true life not in isolation but in fellowship, and if that fellowship rests on the discovery of true relations between men, then laws and constitutions are but the road to freedom. And if religious freedom goes hand in hand with religious fellowship, then the creed that maintains that fellowship is but an expression of the truth that makes men free.

Of course a creed may be misused. It may be interpreted in a narrow and coercive way. So may laws and constitutions be misused. Or a creed may be a false creed, expressing untrue relations and narrowing fellowship. So may constitutions and laws be falsely formed and thus may produce slavery. There is the danger of tyranny, whether in State or Church. And always men are to be found who hold that tyranny can be destroyed only by anarchy, that liberty can be main-

tained only by the abolition of law. But that way madness lies. The cure for misuse of law is right use of law. The cure for bad law is good law. When laws rightly express the life of a people and are administered to protect that life, then they are the guarantees of freedom. So must it be with Christian liberty. If a creed is a false creed or is falsely used, then it will produce slavery. But the cure for that slavery will be a true creed and a true conception of its use. The question then comes as to whether or not the Apostles' Creed is such a true expression of the Christian allegiance and the Christian fellowship, and if so how it is to be interpreted and used. That brings us to the subject of the next chapter, the origin and character of the Apostles' Creed.

THE ORIGIN AND CHARACTER OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

II

THE ORIGIN AND CHARACTER OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

THREE things are immediately to be said about the Apostles' Creed. In the first place, it was not written by the Apostles. Later tradition ascribed it to them, even going so far as to assign its separate clauses to individual members of the Twelve. We know now that, although it may claim a right to its title on the ground that it correctly expresses apostolic thought, yet it dates from a time much later than that of the Apostles.

In the second place, the Apostles' Creed was not composed all at once. It was the result of a growth, taking centuries to reach its present form.

In the third place, the Apostles' Creed is not a universal creed. There were many creeds in use in the early Church, and the particular development which resulted in the

Apostles' Creed took place in the West. While common to the Church of Rome and nearly all Protestantism, yet it is not used in the Eastern Churches, and is not strictly an ecumenical creed.

These considerations suggest that the creed is not to be regarded as a fixed and final formula for Christian faith. The creed is the product of the life of the Church. And it is therefore to be interpreted as a living product. Its character and meaning can therefore be understood only by its history. What were the causes that produced this creed? How is it related to the New Testament? How is it related to the life and experience of the Church? How does its history affect its interpretation and cast light on its value and use to-day?

I

The Apostles' Creed in substantially its present form can be traced back to the middle of the sixth century. But this creed was developed from a creed of which we have a definite account in the fourth century, and which was used in the Church of Rome.

This Roman creed is preserved in Latin in the writings of Rufinus of Aquileia about 400 A. D. A translation runs as follows: *I believe in God the Father Almighty: and in Christ Jesus, His only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Holy Ghost from Mary the Virgin, crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried; on the third day He rose from the dead, ascended into the heavens, sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence He shall come to judge quick and dead. And in the Holy Ghost, holy Church, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of flesh.*

This creed is also given in Greek by Marcellus of Ancyra, about 341 A. D. This form differs from that given by Rufinus only by the omission of the word "Father" in the first clause, and by the addition of the clause, "eternal life." Although Greek was probably the original language of this creed, and although the testimony of Marcellus shows that it was in use at Rome before the middle of the fourth century, yet the text as it comes to us from Rufinus is more reliably preserved and is therefore to be preferred.[1]

[1] For the form in Greek and Latin see A. E. Burn, *An*

It will be seen that the more important differences between this creed and our present creed consists in the lack of the following words and phrases: "Maker of heaven and earth," the word "conceived," the words "suffered" and "dead," the phrase "He descended into hell," the word "Catholic," and the phrases "communion of saints" and "life everlasting."

But now this creed in use in the fourth century, and which differs so little from our creed to-day, can itself be traced back to a creed in use in Rome at about the middle of the second century, perhaps earlier. This creed has not come down to us in absolutely definite form, but has to be collected from various sources. Consequently we cannot be sure as to its exact contents. Some scholars, including Prof. Harnack, think it to be practically the same as the creed of Rufinus. Others hold that it was shorter. Prof. McGiffert gives the following as its probable form:

I believe in God the Father almighty and

Introduction to the Creeds, p. 46. McGiffert, *The Apostles' Creed,* pp. 42–3. Kattenbusch, *Das apostolische Symbol,* Vol. I, pp. 62 ff.

in Christ Jesus his son, who was born of Mary the Virgin, was crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried, on the third day rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, sitteth on the right hand of the Father, from whence he cometh to judge quick and dead; and in Holy Spirit, resurrection of flesh.[1]

We find then a creed at least as long as the above form, and perhaps as fully developed as that of Rufinus, in use at Rome by about 150 A. D., perhaps earlier. What was the origin and character of this earlier creed?

II

In regard to it two things are quite clear. In the first place it was closely connected with Baptism. It may have been used as a basis for the instruction of catechumens, those to be baptised, or it may have been used as a confession of faith on the part of the candidate at the time of Baptism. In either case it was essentially a baptismal creed.

In the second place, this creed was an

[1] *The Apostles' Creed*, p. 7.

enlargement or development of the formula used in Baptism. The person to be baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit expressed his faith in that Name, or received his preparation for Baptism through instruction as to the meaning of that Name. The creed is the expansion of the baptismal formula. To understand then the origin and character of this creed, we must consider the subject of Baptism, and especially the form of words used in Baptism. What was the original baptismal formula?

It might seem as though that question were definitely answered for us by the saying of Jesus, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." [1] But here we meet with a difficulty. This is the only place in the New Testament where Baptism is spoken of as given in the name of the Trinity. Baptism is mentioned many times in the New Testament. But with the exception of this one passage it is mentioned either

[1] Matt. 28:19.

without any formula given, or with some such form as "in" or "into Christ," or "into the name of the Lord Jesus." Examples of this are so common in Acts and in the epistles of St. Paul that it is not necessary to quote cases.[1] If it were not for this one passage in Matthew we should take it for granted that early Baptism was always given in the name of Jesus or Christ. How shall we explain this diversity?

It may be contended that these words of Jesus were spoken, and afterwards were for a time forgotten or disregarded. But this seems most unlikely.

It may be held that two different formulas were in use, and that they were regarded as equivalent in meaning. Inasmuch as Baptism into the name of Jesus implied Baptism into the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, it was not necessary to distinguish between the two formulas. Such a view would have the truth that these two forms undoubtedly had the same essential contents,

[1] See the following passages: Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5, Rom. 6:3, I Cor. 1:12–16 (where the argument implies that they were baptised not into the name of Paul, but into the name of Christ) Gal. 3:27.

and to this truth we must shortly return. But it is very unlikely that two such different formulas existed side by side in the apostolic practice.

The most probable explanation, and the one now generally accepted by New Testament scholars, is that originally Baptism was given in the name of Jesus or of Christ, and that the Trinitarian form is a later, even although a perfectly legitimate, development of the original formula. He who was baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus was baptised into the name of the Father whom He revealed, and into the name of the Spirit whom He brought. The Trinitarian form became established, and the earlier form gradually disappeared from use.

But how then about the Trinitarian form given to us in the words of our Lord? Did Jesus not speak these words? We must remember that in the Gospels we do not have a literal transcript of our Lord's words. In the first place He did not speak in Greek but in Aramaic. In the second place our sources for His sayings are complex. These sayings were originally preserved by tradition.

They were incorporated into a collection of His sayings, ascribed to St. Matthew, and into the earliest of our Gospels, that of St. Mark. These two sources are doubtless the basis of our present synoptic Gospels. These contain reliable testimony as to the life and words of our Lord. But they cannot be stressed to verbal accuracy. They carry clear evidences of later recensions, of changes creeping in, of modifications that express the different points of view of the writers. To obtain the real words of our Lord we are obliged to compare our sources and to get back to their underlying substratum. In many cases we can do this with confidence that we have reliable evidence as to our Lord's words. In other cases we must frankly recognise that later elements have crept in, and that we have reflections of a later time. This passage in St. Matthew is most probably such a reflection. After the Trinitarian formula had become general it was reflected back by tradition, and was, with entire honesty, supposed to have come from Jesus Himself. There is no reason why Christian believers should be disturbed

by this result. The Gospels are pictures rather than strict historical writings. And while we can be very sure of fundamenal and original elements contained in them, we must also recognise the effect of later tradition.

Indeed the result here reached can be seen to be distinctly helpful in our understanding of the nature and meaning of the early creed. If primitive Baptism was in the name of the Lord Jesus, then the primary attitude on the part of the man to be baptised was *faith in the Lord Jesus*. That Jesus was the Christ, or more strictly that the Christ who was to come was Jesus, this was the primary Christian confession of faith. This confession became a fact in Baptism.

Here we have the essential germ of the early Christian creed. It was the confession of Christ. We have an early form of such a confession preserved for us in an interpolation that at some early date crept into the text of the eighth chapter of Acts, the saying of the Ethiopian eunuch at his Baptism, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." [1]

[1] Acts 8:37. See Revised Version, margin.

Although this is doubtless not a part of the original text, yet it well illustrates the early confession of faith made at Baptism. We may compare with this the passages of a creedal character in the New Testament which have been already quoted in the preceding chapter, as also the saying of St. Paul, "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." [1] The foundation of the Christian faith is Jesus Christ.

Now see what happened. Baptism came to be administered in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. And, as previously pointed out, this development was no departure from the meaning of the original formula. He who was baptised into the name of Jesus was also baptised into the name of the Father whom Jesus revealed. The Christian God was the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He that knew the Son knew the Father also. This knowledge of the Father through Jesus Christ His Son was one fundamental element of the Christian experience.

[1] I Cor. 3:11.

And the other fundamental element was the life of the Spirit. The New Testament through and through is the book of the Holy Spirit. Through Christ the followers of Christ were knit together into a new company. And the bond that united them was a divine bond. They were in possession of, or rather possessed by, a new and living Spirit. In Baptism into Christ they were baptised into the Holy Spirit of God. Thus Baptism into the name of Jesus became Baptism into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. This was no new Baptism. It was but making explicit that which was implicit in Baptism into Christ. Small wonder that a later generation with spiritual if not with literal truth put that form of Baptism into the words of Christ. In so doing they were building on that foundation than which no other could be laid.

Hence the creed. The man to be baptised into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, said, " I believe in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Ghost." The primary creed was but the

expression of the baptismal formula. And the essence of that creed was belief in Jesus. The primary part of the creed was the second part, "I believe in Jesus Christ."

So much as this then can be clearly seen; the triune formula in Baptism was the outcome of Baptism into the name of Jesus, and the early creed was the expression of this formula. Baptism into Christ issued in Baptism in the name of the Trinity, and this Trinitarian formula was the basis of the creed which we find in use in the middle of the second century. So far we are on sure ground. [1]

III

But now we come to a more disputed question. This creed contained much more than a simple expression of belief in Father, Son,

[1] It is held by McGiffert that the words of St. Paul in II Cor. 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost" are the immediate basis of the early Roman creed, rather than the form given by St. Matthew. It hardly seems that McGiffert's argument meets the fact that the creed is in order and in general form more nearly akin to the passage in St. Matthew, than to that in second Corinthians. But, however that may be, the results as stated above are not materially affected.

and Holy Ghost. In the form given by Rufinus and in use in the fourth century, it contained nearly all the contents of our present Apostles' Creed. And the form in existence in the middle of the second century if not identical with that used by Rufinus was at any rate nearly so. It contained a large number of additional clauses not found in the baptismal formula. It was not simply an expression of that formula but an expansion of it. At the very least it added the word "almighty" to the belief in God, it included the birth, crucifixion and burial of our Lord, His resurrection, ascension, session at the right hand of the Father, and coming again to judge the quick and the dead. After the words "Holy Ghost" it included the phrase "resurrection of the flesh." In addition it very likely had the word "only" before "Son," and in the last division the phrases "Holy Church" and "forgiveness of sins." How did these additional clauses come into the creed? What were the reasons that led to this expansion of the baptismal formula?

There are two theories, positive and

polemic. The positive theory holds that the development of the creed was in order to incorporate in it the main positive elements of the Christian faith. The polemic theory holds that this development was intended to reject erroneous views or heresies, as those heresies came into existence and were seen to be hostile to the Christian faith.

The former view holds then that the creed was intended to give a brief summary of the main contents of Christian belief, such as would naturally form the basis of instruction before Baptism. Thus the creed emphasises the main outline of the life of Christ, giving a brief summary of the gospel story. It gives the elements of belief in God the Father and in the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection, very probably also of belief in the holy Church and the forgiveness of sins. These were looked upon as the essential elements of the Christian faith.

This view has been strongly maintained by Harnack, who finds little of polemic character in the early creed. The same position is well put by C. H. Turner, as follows: "The most important caution to be given at

this point is that we must be chary of attributing to the less conscious creed-formation of the second century the same motives which animated the more conscious work of the fourth. We must not assume, because the new clauses of the Creed of Nicæa were aimed directly against Arius, that the expansion by which the earlier Creed recited its belief in the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ was directed against Docetism, or the expansions of the belief in the Holy Ghost against other aspects of the Gnostic movement. In other words, we must allow for more of a positive element in the earlier stages of the Creed than in the later; there was more of the desire to embody in brief compass the most fundamental heads of the Church's own belief, less, as yet, of the intention to erect sign-posts of warning against the deviations of heresy. . . . Perhaps in the clause on the resurrection of the flesh we first meet with something like definite antagonism to Gnostic error." [1]

On the other hand the polemic theory

[1] *Use of Creeds and Anathemas in the Early Church,* p. 15 f.

holds that practically the whole expansion of the creed was negative or polemic in character, and that it was especially directed against the heresy of Gnosticism. Gnosticism was the greatest theological foe of early Christianity. It was a strange complex of Greek and other elements. It tended to incorporate into itself certain Christian ideas, and then to present itself as true Christianity. It held that the true God is a being removed by a vast distance from the world, and having connection with it only by a long and gradually descending scale of semi-divine beings or "æons." The creator of the world, who was considered to be identical with the God of the Old Testament, was one of these æons, quite low down in the scale, and he made poor work of creation. The world, especially the fleshly nature of man, was essentially evil. The heavenly Christ was a being of a much higher order, who came down to earth to impart a spiritual nature to certain favoured souls, and thus to rescue them from this evil world. He did not really become man, but temporarily entered a human body. He was not really born, and did not really

suffer or die. All this was only appearance. Hence the so-called heresy of Docetism, meaning to "seem," namely, that his humanity was only a semblance. Returning to his heavenly estate he opened up to the Gnostic, the one who knew, the enlightened man, the possibility of a spiritual nature and the way of escape from the evil flesh.

Fantastic as all this seems to us, Gnosticism was a great source of danger to the early Church. One of its chief representatives was Marcion. Prof. McGiffert holds that practically all the new clauses introduced into the early creed were directed against the heresies of Marcion. The word "almighty" applied to God, the statement that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, as well as the emphasis on His passion and death were all, it is claimed, directed against this heresy.

It would seem as though neither one of these two views could contain all the truth. The whole connection of the creed with Baptism seems to indicate a positive purpose. And that positive purpose is fundamentally connected with allegiance to Jesus Christ.

That, in the expansion of that belief and in the outline of the gospel story in the creed, the positive development should also take account of hostile views seems inevitable. And that some of the articles of the creed can best be explained through a polemic reference seems indubitable. We may therefore reasonably assume that while the underlying character of the creed was a positive expression of faith in Christ, its development was also partly directed against views hostile to that faith. But the creed did not come into being for the rejection of false views, but for the expression of a positive faith.

THE CREED AND THE BIBLE

III

THE CREED AND THE BIBLE

WHY should we believe the Creed? Article VIII, of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Episcopal Church, declares that "The Nicene Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture." Behind the creed stands the Bible. The Episcopal Church, in common with the Church of England and with all Protestantism, takes the position that the final witness to Christian faith lies not in the creeds and not in the authority of the Church, but in the Bible. This position is of such importance and has so close a bearing on the place of the creed that it demands careful consideration.

I

That the Church of England at the Reformation, closely followed in this respect by the Episcopal Church in America, fully accepted the Protestant position of the supremacy of Scripture can be clearly seen by a study of our sources. The Thirty-Nine Articles cannot be regarded as a final and sufficient statement of the Church's position, and no subscription to them has ever been required in the American Episcopal Church. Nevertheless they are a valuable witness to the historical attitude of the Church, and especially of its attitude to the Bible. In this respect Article VIII just quoted only reflects the position of Article VI, "Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation," and of Article XX, "Of the Authority of the Church," which latter Article in reality limits the authority of the Church by that of Scripture. In the Articles of the English Church, Article XXI, "Of the Authority of General Councils," reads as follows: "General Councils may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of princes.

And when they be gathered together (forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the spirit and word of God) they may err, and sometime have erred, even in things pertaining unto God. Wherefore things ordained by them as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of Holy Scripture." In the American Prayer Book the place of this Article is taken by the following note: "The Twenty-first of the former Articles is omitted; because it is partly of a local and civil nature, and is provided for, as to the remaining parts of it, in other Articles." The part that is "of a local and civil nature" is evidently that referring to "the commandment and will of princes," a reference deemed inapplicable under a republican form of government. The "remaining parts of it," those dealing with the relation of the authority of the Church in Councils to the authority of Scripture, are evidently covered by the other Articles here referred to. It should also be noted that the two Books of Homilies, commended in Article XXXV as

containing "a godly and wholesome Doctrine, and necessary for these times," are full of the emphasis upon the supremacy of Scripture.

This attitude is, of course, not confined to the Articles. It is clearly expressed in the services for Ordination. Priest and Bishop alike state their persuasion that the Holy Scriptures contain all doctrine required as necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and express their determination to teach nothing, as necessary for eternal salvation, but that which they shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture. It is of especial significance that in its ordination services the Church of England deliberately did away with the assent to the theology of the creeds required in the Roman Church, and substituted for it the promise of conformity to Scripture. Not the creed but Scripture is made the basis for Christian faith.[1]

[1] For a full discussion of this subject, and especially for the relation between the promise of conformity to Scripture and the promise "so to minister the Doctrine and Sacraments, and the Discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and as this Church hath received

II

This position as to the supremacy of Scripture seems to many persons to-day to be full of difficulties. It often seems to imply a mechanical conception of the Bible, and to stand in the way of freedom of thought. A closer consideration, however, will show that these consequences do not follow.

The vindication of this position lies in the essentially historic character of the Christian religion. Christianity is a religion with a historic Founder, Jesus Christ. And He is not only Founder of the religion, He is its object. Christianity is faith in Jesus Christ. It sees in Him the supreme revelation of God, and it finds in Him the source of the redeeming power of God in the world.

Now it is always possible that Christian faith may tend to get away from faith in Jesus, and may substitute for that faith certain theories about Him or certain ideas or ideals put in place of Him. But Christianity

the same, according to the commandments of God" see A. V. G. Allen, *Freedom in the Church,* Chap. III. Macmillan, 1907.

is not a mere set of ideals. It is the belief in Jesus, the belief that the living God is manifested as alone the *living* God can be manifested, in life. And the supreme manifestation is in that Life which was the light of men, which St. John calls the Word. Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the message, the revelation, of God to the world. And just in so far as theories or ideas are untrue to Jesus Christ they are in the deepest sense not truly Christian. All truth that claims to be Christian must meet the test of the truth as it is in Jesus.

It is sometimes said that historic facts can have no meaning or value for religion, that religion has to do with the present relation to the living God, and not with the facts of a dead past. What happened in Palestine nearly two thousand years ago can make no difference to religion to-day. In answer it is to be said that of course religion deals with the present relation to the living God, and not with the facts of a dead past. But is there any dead past? Has the history of the past no relation to the living present? That depends on what we mean by history.

If history be a mere set of dead facts without meaning or purpose, if human life be a thing without contact with the life of God, then indeed history can have no religious value for us to-day. But if history be the current of human life, if God be in living contact with that human life, guiding it, manifesting Himself in it, drawing it to Himself, then that history must be of essential value for the life with God. And if the supreme expression of God in history was in Jesus Christ, if in the fulness of time God was revealed in His Son, if through that gift a new life and a new power came to the world, then that history is of supreme importance to us to-day. And the historic Jesus belongs not to a dead past, but has opened up to us an eternal relation with the living God.

The ideals of our country cannot be separated from its history, from the historic persons through whom those ideals were realised. Do away with that history, and the ideals become unreal and without power. In love for our country's ideals we rightly direct the reverence of our children to those men in whom those ideals became flesh. So it is

supremely with the religious, with the Christian, life. If religion be a thing apart from the world, then for it history can have no significance. But if God actually comes into contact with the life of men, then the history of man is of the deepest meaning for the life with God. And if God has supremely manifested Himself in His Son, if the Word of God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, then the life of that incarnate Word becomes a life of eternal significance and value.

This result brings us directly to the value of Scripture for Christian faith. For it is in the Bible, essentially, of course, in the New Testament, that we find our sources for the knowledge of Christ and of the effect that He produced on the life of the world. And as the New Testament cannot be understood without the Old Testament, with which it stands in such close contact, the Old Testament also, although in a subordinate degree, is essential for the understanding of the historic Christ. If Christian faith is to be truly Christian, if it is to be true to Christ, then it must constantly go back to the Bible. This is the essential basis for the position of our

Church as to the supremacy of Scripture, for its teaching that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation." If the Church is to be true to Christ, then it must be true to Scripture, which is the oldest source of our knowledge of Christ.

It is sometimes said that the Church is older than the Bible, or more specifically that the Christian Church is older than the New Testament, and therefore is of superior authority. But this statement, while true in form, is misleading in contents. The Church *is* older than the New Testament. Query: What Church is older than the New Testament? Answer: The early Church, the Church of a part of the first century. Query: What do we know about that early Church? Answer: What we find in the New Testament! That is virtually all that we know about it; that is to say, the mass of our knowledge of it is derived from the New Testament itself. Thus the appeal to the early Church as our supreme authority for the knowledge of Christ and of the interpretation of Him by His followers is nothing else than an appeal to the New Testament. The po-

sition is not affected that the later Church must itself find in the New Testament its constant source of the truth as it is in Jesus.

Of course this appeal to Scripture does not mean that there is to be no theological advance. The theology of each age has its own task, and that task is to express truth in the terms of its own thought and to apply it to its own problems. And if we believe the promise that the Spirit is to guide us into all the truth, then we must believe that the Church shall with the ages advance into an ever new and deeper interpretation of Jesus Christ. But that interpretation, if it is to be really Christian, must be the interpretation of Jesus Christ Himself, and not of some substitute for Him. It must not substitute for Jesus some merely ideal figure or some theory about Him. The Church in all its theological advance must keep that advance true to the mind of Christ, true to the Spirit of Jesus. Hence the Church must continually turn back to the Bible as the constant and unrepeatable source of its knowledge of Christ.

III

The supposition that this attitude towards the Bible is hostile to freedom of thought, or that it implies a mechanical theory of inspiration, rests upon a confusion. It confuses the authority of the Bible with the authority of a special theory of inspiration put upon the Bible and not drawn from the Bible itself. The theory of infallible inspiration has certainly opposed freedom of thought. It has hindered the advance of science, as in the "conflict between Genesis and geology," it has stood in the way of honest criticism, and has thus interfered with a true knowledge of the Bible itself. But such a theory of infallibility has not been drawn from the Bible. It has been put upon the Bible from outside. Although not formally set forth as such, yet it is, practically and in the objectionable sense of the word, a "dogma," a theory resting on mere ecclesiastical authority, as the infallibility of the Pope is a dogma resting on mere ecclesiastical authority. The impediment to freedom has not been in Scripture itself, but in the subordination of Scripture to a theory,

to the ecclesiastical dogma of an infallible or mechanical inspiration.

Here has been the inconsistency of Protestantism. Recoiling from the authority of the Church, it found freedom in the authority of the Bible as it revealed Jesus Christ. And then, as though fearing to trust this source, it fell back on the theory of infallibility and proceeded to regard the Bible in the light of this theory. Such a procedure is natural enough to Roman Catholicism, which upholds the infallibility of the Church and its supremacy over Scripture. It is unnatural for Protestantism, which maintains that the authority of the Church must be limited by Scripture. Yet Protestantism was unwilling to let Scripture tell its own story unhampered by tradition! Scripture itself as the source to us of Christian truth has never been hostile to freedom of thought. But the theory of an infallible book has been just as much of a hindrance as has been the theory of an infallible Church. Both theories rest only on ecclesiastical authority. Neither one has anything to do with the true authority of Holy Scripture. The theory of an infallible

Bible still rules substantially untouched today in the Church of Rome. Protestantism is already throwing off the yoke which it is no longer able to bear.

It follows that any theory of inspiration ought to be drawn from the Bible itself, and not to be superimposed upon it from outside. Devotion to the Bible demands that we should let it shine by its own light. We are to study it for what it is, and not in the light of a theory that hinders us from discovering its true nature.

It follows that the position of the supremacy of Scripture not only permits but demands Biblical criticism. The word criticism has an unfortunate sound. Popularly it means to judge unfavourably. Of course no such meaning belongs to it as it is applied to the study of the Bible. The word itself means simply to judge or estimate. And if we are to understand the Bible, criticism in that sense is absolutely necessary. We must try to understand the Bible as it is.

In such an attempt two things are necessary. We must first seek by study and comparison of documents to find out what is the

actual text of the Bible. This is known as "textual" or as the "lower" criticism. The second attempt is to study the Bible as history, to get at its sources, to estimate the age of its various parts, to discuss questions of authorship, and to obtain a clear idea of the historical events of which the Bible is our witness. This is "historical" or the "higher" criticism. The word "higher" carries no claim to infallibility and makes no assumption of superiority. And the results of higher criticism are not necessarily radical or destructive in character. Any man is a "higher critic," good or bad, who studies the Bible in its historical setting. Without such criticism the Bible itself cannot be understood.[1]

The creed is, then, the product of the Church, and is the expression of the Church's belief in and loyalty to Jesus Christ. It does not stand by itself alone, nor is it to be accepted merely on the authority of the Church. The final test of the creed is Christ Himself.

[1] See H. S. Nash, *The History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament, being the History of the Process whereby the Word of God has won the Right to be Understood.* Macmillan, 1900.

Therefore the creed must find its verification in the Scriptures, which are the oldest source of our knowledge of Christ. Behind the creed stands the Bible.

We have discussed the origin and character of the Apostles' Creed, and its relation to the Bible. That discussion should cast light on the interpretation and use of the creed to-day.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE APOSTLES' CREED TO-DAY

IV

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE APOSTLES' CREED TO-DAY

CERTAIN considerations resulting from our previous study will serve to give a background to the subject of this chapter. And first among these considerations is the fact that the creed is fundamentally an expression of loyalty to Jesus Christ. The word "belief" or "faith," as previously suggested,[1] has two meanings, personal and intellectual, belief *in* and belief *that*. The personal meaning is an expression of trust or confidence in a person. The intellectual meaning is an expression of a conviction that certain facts or statements are true. The former denotes a living faith, the latter an intellectual conviction.

[1] See above, p. 18.

I

Of these two elements the former is religiously by far the more important. If men are saved by faith, that faith must express a living confidence or trust, and not a mere orthodoxy of belief. It is in the latter sense that St. James says that "the devils also believe, and shudder." [1] No salvation comes out of mere accuracy of views. And the creed has its importance for Christian life not because it expresses accuracy of theological statement, but because it expresses a living faith in Jesus Christ and in the revelation of God that comes through Him. To approach the creed from the point of view of considering it merely or primarily a matter of intellectual statement is radically to misinterpret the historic character of the creed and radically to misunderstand its value for us to-day.

Yet these two elements, personal and intellectual, cannot altogether be separated. A personal faith demands and carries with it intellectual contents. A child who believes *in* his mother also believes *that* his mother is

[1] James 2:19.

worthy of his trust. This conviction may not be expressed in any explicit form, but it is implicit in the very act of trust itself. If in the development of the child he is forced to believe that his mother is unworthy of his trust, then that trust will be shaken at its foundation. So it is with belief in God and in Christ. The personal trust must carry with it such intellectual elements as shall make that trust possible. Thus the creed, while fundamentally expressing allegiance or loyalty, yet carries with it such intellectual statements or convictions as that loyalty demands.

It is in regard to the second of these two elements that there is any problem as to the interpretation of the creed to-day, any problem of honesty as to its meaning for the modern man. We must therefore not shirk the intellectual side. But we must remember that it is secondary to and expressive of a personal contents. Its value is not for itself, but for the living personal faith that it enshrines and guards.

In the second place, it is to be remembered that the creed is essentially *one*. It is not a

set of disconnected propositions without any inward relation to each other. Part of the difficulty in regard to the acceptance of special clauses comes from a disregard of this connection, from taking a clause as though it stood all by itself, a mere isolated fragment. And while the difficulty is not necessarily removed by considering its relation to the oneness of the creed, yet at any rate we get a better sense of proportion if that oneness is kept in view. And a sense of proportion has much value.

In the third place, the creed is a corporate rather than an individual product. We saw in the first chapter that a creed as such is an expression of truth which is felt to be vitally connected with religious fellowship.[1] And the Apostles' Creed is the outcome of an experience that is greater than that of any individual, the experience of a corporate fellowship in Christ. An individual Christian may very properly approach the creed with the conviction that it carries with it elements of a religious and Christian experience that may

[1] It may be noted that the original form of the Nicene Creed began "We believe."

go beyond his own capacity to assimilate.

What is here suggested is not an arbitrary or unmoral or unscientific leap in the dark, an acceptance of statements on the mere basis of an external authority. Such an act is immoral. What is suggested is that the individual in religious and Christian matters, as well as in scientific or political matters, may well take account of an experience that is wider than his own. In scientific and in political matters we constantly live in reliance on such a wider experience. May not the individual Christian, expressing his loyalty to Christ and to the fellowship that comes from Him, naturally expect to find in the creed which is the outcome of that fellowship, elements that may go beyond his own experience?

Such a consideration by no means sets aside difficulties as to the individual's accepting statements in the creed concerning which he is in doubt. But it does again suggest a sense of proportion, in connection with which such difficulties may well be considered. Are they difficulties that strike at the root of the allegiance to Christ? Then they must be re-

moved before the creed can be accepted. Or are they difficulties that concern only minor points, not vitally affecting the great corporate contents of the creed? In that case they may at least be regarded with the sense of proportion that comes from the recognition that that corporate experience is greater than the experience of the individual. And again a sense of proportion has much value.

In the fourth place, the creed is not an absolute finality. It cannot claim to be a completely final or sufficient statement of Christian truth. This fact is evident for two reasons.

First, the Apostles' Creed is itself a growth, and a growth that is the outcome of the Church's experience and the Church's needs. It did not spring into being all at once, but it is the result of a long process of development. It is the product of the Church's life. And the Church is still the living Church. It did not cease to live when the Apostles' Creed reached its completed form at some obscure period in about the sixth century. The creed was made for the Church, and not the Church for the creed.

Secondly, as discussed in the last chapter, behind the creed stands the Bible. The Bible, not the creed, is the source of our knowledge of Christ. Every article of the creed must stand or fall by the test of Scripture.

These four considerations, that the creed is primarily an expression of allegiance to Jesus Christ, that the creed is a whole, and not a set of disconnected propositions, that the creed is a corporate rather than a merely individual utterance, and that the creed is not an absolute finality, but is the product of a long development and goes back to Scripture for its verification, these four considerations should form a background for the discussion as to the meaning and interpretation of the creed to-day.

II

In the second chapter it was seen that the Apostles' Creed in its development embraced two elements, positive and polemic. The positive element concerned faith in Jesus Christ. The polemic element concerned the rejection of various views that were hostile

to that faith. Substantially these same two elements may now be expressed for us as permanent and progressive. The relation between these two brings us to the heart of the question as to our interpretation of the creed.

The permanent element in the creed is belief in Jesus Christ and in the revelation of God that comes through Him. For belief in Jesus carries for us, as it did for the early Church in its baptismal symbol, belief in the Father whom He revealed, and in the Holy Spirit, who through Him found new expression in the life of man. The Church Catechism well sums up the meaning of the creed: "What dost thou chiefly learn in these Articles of thy Belief?"

"First, I learn to believe in God the Father, who hath made me, and all the world.

"Secondly, in God the Son, who hath redeemed me, and all mankind.

"Thirdly, in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me, and all the people of God."

It may be correctly said that the essence of the creed is belief in the Trinity. But belief in the Trinity is too often regarded as a mere abstract belief, as a set of doctrines

more or less difficult of apprehension, and more or less remote from human life. It is therefore better and more true to the actual history of the creed to say that the essence of the creed is belief in Jesus Christ. It is out of that belief that there arose belief in the Trinity, which latter is therefore no abstract belief, but is in its essence belief in Jesus Christ, through whom the Father is revealed, in whom the redeeming love of God is experienced, through whom the presence of God's Holy Spirit becomes a power in the hearts of believers and in the corporate life of the Church.

Loyalty to the creed demands loyalty to Jesus Christ. He who believes in Jesus Christ, who finds God in Him, and who gives to Him his allegiance, he believes in the very heart of the creed. He who with that belief takes the creed upon his lips, says it with the same meaning with which it was said at Baptism in the early Church.

All departures from this meaning are departures from the historic meaning of the creed. To make the creed stand for a mere set of religious or Christian ideas and not

for loyalty to the historic Jesus is to depart from the original basis of the creed.

We have seen that the creed was partly directed against Gnosticism. And Gnosticism saw in the Christian faith a collection of ideas rather than the actual presence of God realised in history. It conceived of God as far removed from the world and therefore incapable of being incarnate in a historic person. It therefore depreciated the historical reality of the life of Christ and His actual contact with the world. Opposed to all this, the creed asserts the historical reality of the life of Jesus, and emphasises the fact that Christian faith is faith in this Jesus who was born of the Virgin Mary and crucified under Pontius Pilate. The historic element lay in the very centre of the early creed.

There is a modern Gnosticism which tends to reduce Christianity to a set of abstract ideas as to the relation between God and men, and makes the creed only a symbol of such ideas. It tends to take the historic element out of Christian faith. But the creed, as related to early Baptism and to the faith of the New Testament, stands for belief in the his-

toric Jesus. To interpret the creed as having merely a mystical or ideal contents, is to depart from its original meaning.

Loyalty to the creed implies above everything else loyalty to Jesus Christ. The rest of the creed is the outcome and expression of that loyalty. In that loyalty we have the permanent element of the creed.

III

We turn now to the progressive elements, by which this loyalty was defined, as further definition and defence became necessary. Such progressive elements are necessary for any faith that is to be a permanent one. Permanent and progressive are not opposed terms. A faith can be permanent only if it is capable of meeting new issues. It must be a living faith if it is to endure. A religion dies when it can no longer meet the problems and come into contact with the ideas of a new world. The permanent is conserved exactly by its capacity for progress. If the faith in Christ is to be a lasting faith, it can be so only because, as new ideas and new problems emerge, it has capacity to express

itself in regard to these new elements. Permanence is not ossification, it is life. And life is progress.

In every time of progress the old truth must then find a new expression, otherwise the old truth will itself be lost. But now comes the important point. Every such new expression must itself find new interpretation as time goes on. The task of theology in any age is to express truth in terms of that age, not of a former age and not of a later one. In every succeeding period, theology must repeat the same task. It must take the old expression, and continually give it new interpretation. Simply to abide by the old formula is to forfeit the very truth that that formula was intended to express. As it expressed truth for its time, so must a later age carry on the same task.

So thought the men who formed the Nicene Creed. The most important issue at the Council of Nicæa concerned the word *homoousion,* " of one substance." Should it be declared that the Son was of one substance with the Father, or only of like substance, or

of different substance? We can now see clearly enough that on the controversy about that word depended the issues of the Christian faith. Was Christ really the Redeemer, uplifting men into the very life of God? Was He really the Word made flesh? Or was He only one more to be added to the demigods of the heathen world? In the terms of that time, the word *homoousion* carried with it the issue between Christianity and heathenism.

It is interesting to see the attitude taken toward this word. The Arians objected to it because it was new. It was not in the Bible, and they would hold to the old truth and to the old expression. The followers of Athanasius maintained that they themselves were the ones who stood by the old truth. But they felt that that old truth could be retained only by a new expression. They dared to express the faith in a new form, because only in that new form could the old faith be maintained. The Arians held by a permanence of the letter, the Athanasians by a permanence of the spirit. The word *homoousion*

was a word of progress. It claimed that the old faith had a right to enter into possession of a new world.

This discussion should cast light on our attitude to-day toward this same word in the Nicene Creed. We do not naturally think of God as a " substance." We think of Him rather as a living and loving Will. We think in terms of character, we use ethical concepts rather than those of substance. And in this respect we come nearer to New Testament thought than we do to the Greek terms of thinking in which this creed is expressed. What then should be our attitude toward the phrase " of one substance with the Father "? Should we reject it as belonging to an outworn metaphysics? Should we not rather maintain that we ourselves are, in our thought of Christ, trying to do for the twentieth century the same thing that Athanasius did for the fourth century? In so doing we accept cordially his results, and at the same time go on to give them new expression for our new time. Therein we are true to the past, for we are reproducing the same procedure in the living present.

This example from the Nicene Creed casts light on our interpretation of those clauses in the Apostles' Creed which deal with progressive or polemic elements. Have we a right to interpret those clauses in the light of modern thought? What constitutes loyalty to the creed? What is an honest uttering of such clauses?

In the first place, we must remember, as before suggested, that the creed is one. It stands for loyalty to Jesus Christ and to the revelation of God through Him. The special clauses must be interpreted as defending that supreme allegiance which the creed guards.

Secondly, it must be remembered that a change or development in the interpretation of special clauses is absolutely necessary if their original truth is to be maintained and preserved. There should be no half-hearted, apologetic attitude toward such a need of interpretation. It is not a departure from loyalty, but the demand of loyalty.

In the third place, the supreme test is this: Does the language of the creed express for its own time the same truth in which we our-

selves believe? If so, then we have every right to claim that language for ourselves, and to claim it not in any evasive way but as our absolute privilege and right. Thereby we are putting ourselves in line with those who made the creed, in line with all those who held or hold allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Apply this test to the example just taken from the Nicene Creed. In regard to the word *homoousion* a man has every right to ask himself, "Had I been at Nicæa, do I trust that by God's grace I should have had courage to stand where Athanasius stood? Then I claim this word *homoousion* as my own, and I claim the right to translate it into the terms that express the same truth for our own times. And in so doing I claim, with humility but with boldness, that I stand with those who defended the faith then, and with those who are prepared to defend it now."

IV

Let us now turn to some of the specific clauses of the Apostles' Creed, and see how these principles apply in their interpretation.

The phrase " Maker of heaven and earth " is of late date in the formation of the creed. If it had appeared early we should doubtless take it to be in opposition to Gnosticism, which held that creation was the work of an inferior deity. But with its late date it is difficult to discover any special polemic motive. Probably it is simply a positive expression of the Christian belief in creation, a belief held to be of great importance in the whole early Church. But in any case the phrase suggests the creation narrative in the first chapter of Genesis. That was doubtless its original sense, and it has been taken in that sense until very recent times. In Archbishop Usher's chronology, creation is definitely dated at 4004 B. C., and that it took place in six days of twenty-four hours each was an accepted belief. Now that the doctrine of evolution is universally accepted we have been forced to a new interpretation. We recognise that divine creatorship is not incompatible with a process occupying millions of years. Yet in our easy-going acceptance of that theory, we may easily forget how recent and how severe was the struggle to allow such an interpreta-

tion as consistent with Christian belief. It is not much more than half a century since Darwinism took the field, and even now there are heard the occasional shots of ultra-orthodox skirmishers who have not happened to hear that the battle is over. The completeness of the victory is instructive. Our fathers found it very hard to reconcile the new interpretation with Christian faith. Yet to-day few intelligent persons will question the loyalty of a believer in evolution who accepts this article of the creed.

"He descended into hell" is another article of somewhat late date in the Apostles' Creed. We do not know its original purpose. It may have been intended to teach the reality of the death of Jesus, or to indicate that He preached to the spirits in prison.[1] The word "hell" has generally been taken as meaning the abode of the dead, Hades, rather than the place of punishment. In the American Episcopal Church the omission of the clause was allowed until the revision of 1892, and now there may be substituted for it the words "He went into the

[1] I Peter 3:19.

place of departed spirits." Thus the meaning of the phrase has long been controverted. But in any case the original thought was that of an abode for the dead somewhere below the earth. As that spatial conception has disappeared we give the words a more spiritual interpretation. Again, few would today be found to question the loyalty of such a re-interpretation.

The phrase "He ascended into heaven" belonged to the early creed, and it is quite probable that it carried no especial polemic interest. It suggests the general outline of the gospel story of Jesus, and the universal belief that after the Resurrection He had been exalted into full fellowship with the Father. Yet we plainly give the words a new interpretation. As originally conceived, the earth was a plane, and heaven was a place existing above the earth. With the Copernican theory such a spatial conception became impossible. The language of the creed is seen to be symbolic. The word symbolic does not at all imply that the language is not true. But it does imply that, if the truth is made identical with the form in which it is con-

veyed, then the truth will be lost as the form changes.

This symbolic character is seen in the next clause, "And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty." The right hand denotes the position of supreme dignity and honour,[1] and this is of course its meaning in the creed. The symbolic character of the language is strikingly brought out by the modern translation of the creed into Chinese. In China the left hand is the position of honour and dignity, and the right hand is the position of subordination. It has therefore become necessary to explain that when the right hand of God is mentioned it is really the left hand that is meant! It might seem as though greater boldness in translation would have furthered the cause of accuracy, and that it might have been better to translate "on the left hand of God." But in any case the example is a striking one as to the need of new interpretations if the old meaning is to be preserved. Bondage to the letter is sometimes denial of the truth.

This constant need of re-interpretation is

[1] See Acts 7: 55–6.

clearly seen in the next clause, "From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." This clause is found in the earliest creed, which therein reflects the thought of the New Testament. Fundamental to the New Testament is the expectation of the speedy return of Christ for judgment, and this expectation was expressed in the strongly realistic terms of cotemporary Judaism. It is natural that this belief should have been incorporated into the early creed.

Now it seems hardly possible to-day to accept this belief in its original form. That expectation of the immediate coming of Christ was not fulfilled. And even if we hold that the *immediacy* of the coming was not an essential part of the belief, yet we can hardly expect the second coming of Christ to take place at some future time in the realistic form presented in the New Testament and implied in the creed. Probably the majority of intelligent Christians will hold that in interpreting the second coming as a process rather than a single event, in looking for a divine judgment on the affairs of men, and in trusting to the future coming of the king-

dom of Christ, they are loyal to the truth of the creed. A new interpretation is the only way in which the old truth can be conserved.

The clause, "The Resurrection of the flesh," has in the Prayer Book translation been softened into "The Resurrection of the body," although in the present Prayer Book the original phrase has been retained in the interrogative form of the creed in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick. This clause was clearly directed against Gnosticism, which held that the flesh is essentially unclean. This idea showed itself in two apparently contrasted yet closely related forms, in asceticism and in sensuality. Asceticism tried to win spiritual life by an abuse of the body. Or again it was held that the truly perfected man, the spiritual man, could indulge in any fleshly pleasure, however impure, without injuring his spirit. As opposed to this, the Christian thought demanded holiness in this life as well as in the life to come. And it emphasised the relation between the two by declaring that in the coming kingdom the resurrection should be that of this same body of flesh. The clause, "the Resurrection of the flesh," ex-

pressed the healthy-mindedness of the Christian attitude to life.

Even with this good purpose, this clause had from the beginning to contend with St. Paul's thought as expressed in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Here St. Paul maintains that the resurrection is not of the natural body but of the spiritual body, "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." The resurrection of the flesh had to undergo a liberal interpretation if it was to agree with St. Paul. Yet even so it was for many years contended that at the resurrection the particles of the present body of flesh should in some mysterious way be brought together to form the body of the resurrection. We have outgrown this carnal conception. By the resurrection of the body we mean that after death we shall find a new and personal expression in some environment that is now unknown to us. Again we can see clearly the need of some such new interpretation if the essential meaning of the creed is to be retained. This new interpretation has been made easier by the wise translation of the word "flesh," by

the word "body." But the fact of this translation only makes more evident the need of the new interpretation.

In regard to the examples already selected from the creed there would probably be little controversy to-day. They have been selected not because they involve doubtful interpretation, but because they involve principles of interpretation which should cast light on more controverted points. The two clauses of the creed which are now the subject of special controversy are doubtless the clauses, "Born of the Virgin Mary," and, "The third day he rose again from the dead." We proceed to the consideration of these.

V

The belief in the Virgin Birth presents to-day many difficulties, and no good can come from ignoring them, or from failing to recognise their force. It is greatly to be wished that discussion of the subject should be free from acrimony and from charges either of disloyalty or obscurantism. Only by such discussion, in a reverent and Christian spirit,

can the real issues be made clear and the real values be appreciated.

It is not necessary here to do more than in the briefest way to state the question as to the evidence in the New Testament. The Virgin Birth is mentioned only in the narratives found in the early chapters of St. Matthew and St. Luke. These narratives are not a part of the original source from which our first three Gospels are derived,[1] but they are of early origin. There is no question of textual criticism involved. These narratives unquestionably belong to the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke as we have them.

Aside from these passages the Virgin Birth is not mentioned in the New Testament.[2] Neither St. Paul, nor the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews nor St. John gives any evidence of having heard of it,[3] although it is these writers who most exalt the Person

[1] See p. 33.

[2] There may possibly be a reference to it in Mark 6:3, which speaks of Jesus as "the carpenter, the son of Mary," in contrast with Matt. 13:55, which speaks of Him as "the carpenter's son."

[3] Passages like Rom. 1:3–4, Gal. 4:4 and John 7:41–2, while of course entirely compatible with a knowledge of the Virgin Birth, furnish no evidence of such knowledge.

of Christ, and in whom the belief in the Incarnation finds its strongest expression.

It is also claimed that there are evidences here and there in the New Testament of a tradition in accordance with which Jesus was regarded as the son of Joseph and Mary. The genealogies in the first chapter of St. Matthew and in the third chapter of St. Luke, which trace the ancestry of Joseph, and the passages in the Gospels which refer to Joseph as the father of Jesus,[1] are claimed as such evidence. In reply it is maintained that the latter passages are only modes of speech not to be pressed to verbal accuracy, and that the genealogies naturally deal with the family with which Mary was joined by marriage, and in which Jesus would legally be reckoned. The words "being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph"[2] are, of course, pointed out in this connection.

In general it must be confessed that the New Testament evidence for the Virgin Birth is extremely slight in comparison, for example, with that for the Resurrection or

[1] Matt. 13:55, Luke 2:48, 4:22, John 1:45, 6:42.
[2] Luke 3:23.

for the belief in the Incarnation. It should, however, for the sake of fairness, be borne in mind that the reliability of the evidence for the fact of the Virgin Birth is not necessarily dependent on the accuracy of all the details of the narratives in which that evidence is contained. The presence of legendary elements, such as the detailed accounts of the angelic appearances, may be recognised without thereby overthrowing the evidence for the Virgin Birth itself.[1]

In dealing with this subject it is well to consider first the religious or spiritual meaning of these narratives. If we find that meaning to be in accord with the general view of Christ that is to be found in the New Testament, and that is of essential value to Christian faith, we shall naturally approach the question of the Virgin Birth with a more favourable attitude than we should if such a meaning were not to be found.

In turning then to consider the meaning of these narratives it is well to get rid of one

[1] This distinction is made by Bishop Gore, *Dissertations on Subjects Connected with the Incarnation,* pp. 21–2, and by G. H. Box, *The Virgin Birth of Jesus,* pp. 185–6, quoting from Bishop Gore.

objection to them which to many persons seems a serious stumbling block. It is sometimes thought that these stories embody the idea that there is something essentially evil in marriage. They are supposed to express the exaltation of celibacy, and therefore to be a reflection on the sacred character of the marriage bond. If this objection were well taken it would indeed be difficult to find any moral or religious defence of the Virgin Birth. The exaltation of celibacy and consequent degradation of marriage have done incalculable injury to Christian ideals. And in these days, when the problem of the family is in the forefront of social problems, any undermining of the sacredness of marriage must be viewed with deep suspicion.

It seems, however, quite clear that no such idea or motive underlies these narratives. For they are the most Hebraic part of the New Testament. Not, of course, that the idea of a supernatural birth is especially a Hebrew idea. That is common enough in other religious thought. What is meant is that these passages are early in date, and that in their whole structure and form they

are overwhelmingly Hebraic. They are distinctly a Hebrew rather than a Greek product. But the exaltation of celibacy and degradation of marriage was a Greek and not a Hebrew idea. The Hebrew exalted marriage. When the putting of marriage on a lower plane began to affect disastrously the ideals of the early Church, this effect was due to the influence of Greek ideas. To suppose that these narratives, the most Hebrew part of the New Testament, result from or embody such an anti-Hebraic conception is to contradict the facts. It would seem then that this objection may be definitely set aside.

For somewhat similar reasons it does not seem that these narratives are due to the belief in the sinlessness of our Lord, or that they especially embody that thought. There is no evidence that such a motive entered into the original stories. And to suppose that the sinlessness of Jesus is vitally connected with the Virgin Birth is again to run the risk of supposing that marriage involves something of a sinful taint.

The inward religious or theological con-

tent of these narratives lies rather in the conviction, common to the whole Christian community, that Jesus could not be explained in human terms alone, but that He must be regarded as the direct gift of God to the world. This idea in one form or another underlies the whole New Testament. While in the first three Gospels there is little theoretical interpretation, yet they see in Jesus, to say the very least, One who cannot be measured by any of the ordinary standards of human life.[1] St. Paul finds in Jesus the second Adam, the new beginning of the race, the pre-existent Son, who is before all things, and in whom all things consist.[2] The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews exalts Jesus above all angels, and believes Him the active instrument of God in creation.[3] St. John

[1] Passages are too numerous to quote fully. It is not so much a question of special texts as of the general attitude toward Jesus. The following references may serve as examples: Matt. 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22, Matt. 9:2–8, Mark 2:6–10, Luke 5:21–24, Matt. 11:27, Luke 10:22, Matt. 14:33, 16:27, 17:5, Mark 9:7, Luke 9:35, Matt. 22:45, Mark 12:37, Luke 20:44, Matt. 26:64, Mark 14:62, Luke 22:69–71, Matt. 28:17.

[2] See, e. g. I Cor. 15:47, Phil. 2:6–11, Col. 1:15–19.

[3] Heb. Chap. 1.

sees in Him the Incarnation of the eternal Word of God.[1] Everywhere Jesus is regarded as surpassing all human standards, and as being the direct gift of God to the world.

Now the accounts of the Virgin Birth seem in their religious contents to express this same conviction about our Lord. Jesus cannot be explained in human terms alone. He is not the mere product of human development. He can be accounted for only by the direct creative act of God. Such seems to be the essential idea that these narratives express.

Such a conviction belongs essentially to faith in Jesus. If He be the mere product of the race, then He is not the Redeemer and Saviour of the race. Christian faith sees in Jesus the new creation of God, the new starting point of humanity. He is not only the Son of man but the Son of God.

Of course this belief can be held without its being expressed in the form of the Virgin Birth. So far as we can see, it was so held by St. Paul, by the author of the Epistle to

[1] John 1:1–18, 6:62, 8:23, 42, 58, 20:28, I John 1:1–2.

the Hebrews, by St. John. It would be going far beyond what is written to identify this belief with belief in the Virgin Birth, or to make the former belief dependent upon the latter. Nevertheless, if we are looking for an inward theological or religious meaning for the narratives of the Virgin Birth, it would seem that that meaning is one common to the whole New Testament and fundamental to belief in Jesus.

When we turn from the story of the Virgin Birth in the New Testament to the purpose of its introduction into the creed we are on uncertain ground. It has been strongly contended[1] that this clause was for an anti-Gnostic purpose, and was intended to defend the actual reality of the human birth of Jesus, against the docetic idea that He was not really born of a woman. I am not convinced that we can be sure that any direct theological motive was involved. It seems likely that the clause belongs to the general outline of the life of Jesus, which outline forms the second division of the creed. It has been seen

[1] For example by McGiffert in *The Apostles' Creed* and by Allen in *Freedom in the Church.*

that this second division is really the fundamental part of the creed, the heart of which was belief in Jesus. Therefore the creed gives this outline of His life, and emphasises the historic character of His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Thus unquestionably it involves a denial of the Gnostic tendency to regard His whole life as humanly unreal. But that the clause as to His birth was especially introduced for this purpose does not seem evident. That purpose was accomplished in the general outline of His life, to which this clause naturally belongs. That the early Church attached no very distinct theological meaning to the Virgin Birth is also witnessed to by the fact that it is not mentioned in the original form of the Nicene Creed as passed in 325 A. D. The reason may be that the danger of Gnosticism was then passed. But the omission suggests that we should not look too closely for a special dogmatic significance in the early belief in the Virgin Birth, or for a special dogmatic motive for its introduction into the creed. The main motive would seem to have been the historical one.

For our interpretation of the significance of the Virgin Birth we must then turn to the New Testament. And here I can only repeat what has been already said. The essential element of the belief is that Jesus Christ is born from above, and is not the mere product of human history. He is the direct gift of God, the new beginning of the human race. This belief, as we have seen, is common to the whole New Testament, and is fundamental to the Christian attitude to Jesus. To use the modern phrase, Christian faith cannot see in Him the mere product of evolution. The Incarnation is not an outcome of human life, but is a divine act of grace. Jesus cannot be explained on the basis of His antecedents in humanity. If a miracle be the direct expression of God's creative will, then Jesus Christ is the miracle of history.

It is evident that some persons will contend that such a belief is identical with belief in the Virgin Birth in the most literal sense. Yet there is no evidence that it was so with St. Paul, with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, or with St. John. To identify

belief in the Incarnation with belief in the Virgin Birth, or to assert that the latter is essential to the Incarnation is to be wise beyond that which is written. Surely he who believes in Jesus Christ as He was believed in by St. Paul and by St. John has grasped the essential of Christian faith.

It is not probable, hardly conceivable, that any more evidence will ever be obtained on the subject of the Virgin Birth. The question as to the historic fact will necessarily be approached differently by different minds. Those persons in whom the religious interest is dominant will probably always feel the difficulties less strongly. Those in whom the scientific and critical spirit is in the lead will doubtless tend to find the fact difficult to accept and the evidence unconvincing. It is impossible to expect identity of opinion. But can there not be expected a unity of faith, the faith in Jesus as the direct gift of God, that faith which underlies the creed, and which these narratives of the Virgin Birth enshrine and guard?

In conclusion it seems in place to express again the hope that the controversy in regard

to this difficult subject should be of a Christian character. Controversy that is conducted in a spirit of hostility and prejudice is contrary to the mind of Christ. But controversy that is in the interest of truth and that is carried on with the conviction that truth is the friend and not the foe of faith, such controversy is Christian.

One difficulty in this whole problem is that the subject does not, and in the nature of the case cannot, lend itself to frank and free public discussion. It concerns the relation between the spiritual and the physical, and that in a matter so sacred that reverence restrains us in considering the connection of these two elements. When we turn to the Resurrection of our Lord we are again concerned with the relation between the spiritual and the physical, but fortunately in such a form that, while the subject is of fundamental importance to Christian faith, there is no such obstacle to a full discussion of the issues involved. Doubtless it is for this reason that the difficulty is not nearly so great in coming to an understanding between different views,

and to a mutual appreciation of the issues involved.

VI

"The third day he rose again from the dead." The creed does not define the nature of the risen body of Christ, or the relation between the body of His resurrection and the body laid at rest in the tomb. Nevertheless the subject presents difficulties, and calls for consideration.

We have already discussed the phrase, "The Resurrection of the body," or of "the flesh," and have seen the difficulty in taking literally these words of the creed. And we have considered the application to them of St. Paul's teaching as to the spiritual body. Now the question naturally arises as to whether we can think of the resurrection of our Lord as the resurrection of the same flesh that was laid in the tomb. And if so, was His risen body different from the risen body of those who rise in Him? If His resurrection is the pledge of ours it would seem difficult to make any such distinction.

When we turn to the New Testament it is evident that no such problem was in the mind of the writers who record the resurrection of Jesus. This is evident from the fact that different conceptions go hand in hand without any question as to their compatibility. On the one hand, there is the conception that His risen body was identical with the body laid in the tomb, and that it possessed the same qualities that belonged to the body of His earthly life. In the clearest and most definite way the evidence asserts that the tomb was empty. There is no trace of any other idea in the minds of the disciples. In St. Matthew it is declared that the women on seeing Jesus after His resurrection took hold of His feet.[1] In St. Luke it is asserted that Jesus spoke the words, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold me having." And it is declared that He ate a piece of a broiled fish before them.[2] In St. John's Gospel, where most of all a purely spiritual idea might have been expected, it is declared that the Lord said to

[1] Matt. 28: 9. [2] Luke 24: 39–43.

Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and see my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and put it into my side." [1] In all these cases it seems that the risen body of our Lord is considered to be identical with the body of the tomb.

On the other hand there are indications of a different idea. In St. Luke's account of the appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the disciples failed to recognise Jesus until He was known of them in the breaking of bread. In the same narrative it is told that He vanished out of their sight, and appeared again suddenly to them as they were with the eleven.[2] In St. John's account of His appearances on the evening of Easter Day, and eight days later, it is expressly declared that the doors were shut.[3] And in St. Paul's account of the appearance of Jesus to him, this appearance, although taking place after the ascension, is put on exactly the same level as the appearance to the other disciples. And St. Paul proceeds immediately to discuss the resurrection of the

[1] John 20:27.
[2] Luke 24:30–36.
[3] John 20: verses 19 and 26.

dead and the nature of the spiritual body, with his whole argument depending on the relation between the resurrection of the Lord and that of believers.[1] In all these cases the thought is evident that the risen body of Christ is looked upon as in some respects essentially different from the fleshly body of His earthly life. This same thought is also indicated by the statement made by St. John and by St. Luke that the clothes in which the body was wrapped were found lying in the tomb.[2] The fact that the risen body of Jesus evidently appeared clothed suggests a spiritual interpretation.

Now our problem to-day is different from that in the minds of the New Testament writers. They expected the speedy return of the Lord and the coming of the Messianic kingdom, which was to bring in a new world order that was to be eternal. Therefore no sharp distinction was in mind between the forms of existence of this life and those of the life to come. We are to-day in a differ-

[1] See I Cor., chap. 15.

[2] See John 20:5–7, and Luke 24:12. The latter passage is however of somewhat doubtful genuineness.

ent position. We can no longer think of this earth as destined to last forever, and we can no longer think of the life beyond in such clear and definite form as was done when the world to come was conceived of as so close at hand. We find ourselves forced to follow in the path opened by St. Paul. We can no longer conceive of our own resurrection in forms that belong directly to this life. We cannot think of the body that is sown as identical with the body that shall be. Rather we believe that God will give us a body as shall please Him, in such a form of existence as we do not now know, but which will become clear to us when we no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face. And it is inevitable that to many men the same problem presents itself in regard to the risen body of our Lord. They find great difficulty in thinking of it as a physical body that could be touched and handled, and that was dependent on physical food. And so they are forced to look to the more spiritual interpretation, suggested in the New Testament itself and natural for our thought today.

What, then, is the essential faith embodied in the clause, "The third day he rose again from the dead"? It is belief in the fact of His resurrection, rather than any theory as to its form. The fact is that our Lord actually rose from the dead, and actually showed Himself to His disciples. No merely "subjective" explanation, no theory of "visions," no mere conviction that Jesus continued to live after His death, expresses the fact embodied in the creed. The belief there embodied is that of a direct and positive manifestation of the risen Lord. But the particular way in which that manifestation took place does not belong to the essence of the creed. There is room for differences of interpretation made necessary by different conceptions of the life to come.

Some years ago there appeared a novel entitled "When It Was Dark." The story represents the whole Christian world as plunged into despair by the supposed discovery of an ancient writing proving that the disciples had secretly carried away the body of the Lord. Such a despair, even on the basis of an hypothesis so absurd, does not

express the true Christian faith. True Christian faith is not faith in the empty tomb, but in the risen and triumphant Lord.

This discussion of the interpretation of the different articles of the Apostles' Creed makes no claim to be exhaustive. And, of course, the interpretations herein suggested make no claim to finality. In the nature of the case such interpretations must vary according to the point of view of the individual as well as of the age. The sole purpose has been to illustrate the main thesis, that the creed necessarily contains a permanent and a progressive element. The permanent element is loyalty to Jesus Christ. The progressive element is found in the various and necessarily changing forms in which that loyalty is expressed.

THE VALUE AND USE OF THE CREED TO-DAY

V

THE VALUE AND USE OF THE CREED TO-DAY

THE outcome of the preceding chapter may seem to be that we can manage to get along with the creed, but that we should be better off without it; that the creed is a necessary evil of which we should make the best. Such a result would be unsatisfactory enough, and would certainly contradict the purpose of the whole previous discussion. It would, I believe, equally contradict the facts of history, and be blind to the value and use of the creed to-day. We must try then to sum up our results, and to come to a conclusion as to the positive value of the creed. In so doing we must refer to our general discussion in the first chapter, with the light cast upon it by our study of the character and interpretation of the Apostles' Creed.

I

It is of special importance to bear in mind that the creed is a badge of a corporate fellowship. It is not a purely individualistic matter. If religion were purely individualistic there would be no need of a creed. There would doubtless be a theology, but not a creed in the technical sense as we have discussed the meaning of the term. A creed expresses the common allegiance of a corporate fellowship. And a Christian creed, the Apostles' Creed, expresses a common allegiance to Christ, who is the basis of the Christian fellowship.

Thus the creed and the Church are vitally connected. For the Church is the outward and visible expression of the fellowship of the Kingdom of God. It is not, of course, identical with that fellowship. There are members of the Church who are not truly members of the invisible, spiritual fellowship that is rooted and grounded in Christ. Even the early Church included an Ananias and a Sapphira. And also there are those who are not members of this visible Church, yet whose

hearts and lives give undoubted testimony to the presence of vital Christian fellowship. There are those who cast out devils in the name of Jesus, and yet walk not in the established paths with His disciples. By their works ye shall know them. Thus the Church is not identical with the Christian fellowship. Nevertheless it stands as the outward and visible expression of that fellowship, the Sacrament of the inward and spiritual reality of the Kingdom of God. Its task is to convert the world into that Kingdom, to transform all life into the spiritual commonwealth of Christ.

When that task is accomplished, there will be no difference between the Church and the Kingdom of God. All life will have been taken up into that fellowship. In the vision of the new Jerusalem St. John saw no temple, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof. When that time comes there will be no Sacraments, for all life will be sacramental; there will be no Church separate from the rest of life, for all life will be under the rule of Christ. But that time is far off. The kingdoms of this

world are as yet far different from the commonwealth of the new Jerusalem. And meanwhile the Church is the organic means for bringing in that divine reality. It is the outward and visible expression of the Kingdom of God.

If in any such sense as this there be a Church, then that Church is an organic reality, as much as is the Nation. And it has its marks of entrance and of membership. Baptism has always been the sign of entrance to the Church. And the Apostles' Creed is a baptismal creed. It expresses allegiance to Christ, and it accompanies Baptism into His Church. The creed is not a purely individualistic thing. It is vitally connected with the whole idea of the Church. He who enters the Church accepts the creed as the testimony to his allegiance to Christ, its Lord and Master.

The creed is not a necessary evil to be made the best of. Unless indeed laws and constitutions are necessary evils to the State. Unless indeed liberty goes with abolition of law. But if liberty in the State comes through constitutions and laws, then liberty

in the Church is in no opposition to the creed of allegiance to the Christ who makes us free.

The Church stands for loyalty to Jesus Christ. It does not and cannot seek to include in its membership those who do not profess that loyalty. It has no place for a divided allegiance, any more than has the Nation. If that be tyranny, make the most of it! If that be narrowness, then the Church is narrow. Its entrance is indeed by the narrow path that leads to the fulness of the life with Christ.

Would then the abolition of the creed make for liberty in the Church? Not unless the abolition of laws makes for liberty in the State. Laws may indeed be misused. They may be harshly applied. They may be narrowly interpreted. Every man can read the signs of the times which in the State to-day demand that laws be made to serve freedom and not tyranny. Only the fool can suppose that that demand means the abolition of law. So may the creed be narrowly interpreted and harshly applied. It would be blindness indeed to shut our eyes to such narrow interpretations, or to fail to recognise that they

seriously threaten the liberty of the Church. But the road to that liberty lies in the true use of the creed and not in its abolition. We must get back to the historical essence of the creed. We must recognise that its details demand new interpretations for new times. So it has always been in the history of the Church. The creed itself has been reshaped to meet these new demands, and its details have continually received new interpretations. The discussion in the preceding chapter has not therefore been intended to play fast and loose with the historical contents of the creed. It has attempted to get back to those historical contents, and to show that the historical essence of the creed is belief in Jesus Christ and in the revelation of God given in Him.

II

From a purely practical point of view it can also be seen that the abolition of the creed would not make for liberty. Every organisation must in some way or other control its own membership. It is in the interest of freedom that the basis of that member-

ship be clearly understood. Otherwise it is dependent on passing moods of thought. Once again the analogy of the State is helpful. An accused man has definite law to appeal to. That law is his protection from a mere tyranny of judge and jury. By that law his rights are secured. So it is with the Church. The history of the Church is full of changing moods, of passing opinions, of adjustments to new modes of thinking. Such new modes of thinking have often seemed to be unchristian. They have been denied their place in the Church. Oftentimes the Church has in one period regarded as heretics those whose orthodoxy in a later age has been unquestioned. Every new thinker has run the risk of heresy. Now if the Church had been able, without any regard for creed, to banish from its membership any one whom the passing orthodoxy condemned, not only would the individual have suffered, but the Church would have been disastrously injured. It is by appeal to a creed, to law, that at once the rights of the individual and the breadth of the Church have been maintained. To have abandoned creeds would have injured

the freedom of the individual and the largeness of the Church.

With all Christian kindness it may be questioned as to whether in Unitarianism the abandonment of all creeds has resulted in complete liberty of thought, or in producing the largest field of religious experience. No subscription or profession of belief is of course required of minister or layman. Why then does it happen that Unitarianism seems to have no place for belief in the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity or the Incarnation? Why does it happen that when Unitarians come to accept those beliefs they cease to be Unitarians? Are those beliefs so absurd that they cannot be held by any men whose thought is free? That would seem to be a somewhat rash assertion. Why then is the liberty of Unitarianism apparently always used to the denial of those beliefs and never to their acceptance? Why is it that there seems to be in Unitarianism no field for such a widespread type of Christian experience? A Unitarian minister is free to believe and to preach what he will. Suppose he were to

believe in and to preach the Trinity and the Incarnation, would he be likely to find a Unitarian congregation that would welcome him as its pastor? Has the absence of a creed really produced the broadest field for Christian experience?

The fact is that mere abstract, indefinite liberty does not exist. Liberty is the right to express one's self in relation to a concrete, definite environment. Liberty in the State is liberty to be a citizen of the State. It is not liberty to destroy the State or to injure it. There are necessarily limits. And the same is true of liberty of thought, at any rate if thought express itself in speech or action. There are necessarily limits both in State and Church. The question is not, How can an absolutely indefinite liberty be attained? but rather, What is the largest liberty that can exist in regard to the actual concrete conditions of life? And in the Church the creed, by making allegiance to Christ the foundation of liberty, maintains and fosters far more liberty than it prevents. Of course the creed has difficulties. It has difficulties because all

advance in thinking has difficulties. But the difficulties that exist with the creed are far less than the difficulties that exist without it.

III

If it be granted that some kind of a creed is necessary for the Church, may it not be maintained that we should have a new creed instead of an old one, that we should take our Apostles' Creed and bring it up to date, reshape it in such a way that it would be free from any need of new interpretation, and would be in clear accord with the necessities of modern thought?

It might be answered that such a proposal is purely academic and incapable of realisation. Or that if realised by any part of the Christian Church, it would only add another to existing creeds, and would therefore be a positive injury to Christian unity. But much more may be said. Even if practicable and even if realised by the whole Church, such a result would be undesirable. Make the creed up to date, up to the present day of the present year. How long would it stay up to date? How long would it be be-

fore to-day would become yesterday? The world moves, and the Church moves with it, because it is the living Church. Get rid of the difficulties to-day, and new ones will appear to-morrow. And those difficulties will be all the greater because of the revision of the creed. For such a revision implies that now all difficulties and all new interpretations are set aside, and that now the creed can be imposed in an absolutely literal way, and as a final statement of truth. The new-made creed that was intended to give freedom to one generation would hang like a fetter upon the freedom of the next. The creed comes to us from the early period of the Church's life. It has remained unaltered for more than a thousand years. It expresses truths which have been wrought out in the process of history, and which are therefore necessarily open to the wider interpretation that that process of history involves. Such a creed offers a far more sound basis for liberty than a new-made creed claiming the right to be literally and narrowly enforced.

Indeed such an attempt to construct a creed or symbol in an absolutely up to date form

and as a final statement of Christian truth is of the very essence of sectarianism. For sectarianism is not a thing that can be identified with any special division of the Christian Church. It is a spirit that may be found in any part of the Church. It conceives of the Church as being united by agreement in certain doctrines or theories, instead of being united in Christ. And no part of the Church is free from that danger. If the Thirty-Nine Articles were looked upon as the basis of unity, the English Church and the Episcopal Church would be sectarian. So long as Rome maintains its rigid attitude toward the decrees of the Council of Trent, it cannot shake off the spirit of a sect. If the various Protestant Churches make their special confessions a finality, they become sectarian in essence.

The same attitude may be taken even toward the creed. If it is made absolutely final and binding in every detail, if it is given a hard and fast interpretation with no room for development of thought, then it becomes essentially a sectarian symbol. The Church is sometimes regarded as a society with certain

definite terms of entrance and membership, like those of any club. Those terms are plainly and literally expressed in the creed, and he who departs from that plain and literal sense has no right to retain his membership. If any member does not like the terms he may leave the society. But that is the sectarian attitude. It puts the creed in the place of Christ. And such a sectarian attitude would be greatly furthered by an attempt to remake the creed "up to date." To reshape it for our own special needs would be to narrow its interpretation and to limit its value. If the Church be merely a club, then that attitude is logical. But if the Church be Catholic, then Christ is the basis of its unity. He who is loyal to Jesus Christ has his place in Christ's Church, and has his right to the creed that is the expression of that loyalty. Freedom lies in the very age of the creed. The creed formed in the early ages of the Church, based upon loyalty to Christ, witnessed to by Holy Scripture, expressing convictions wrought out in the life of the Church and open to the wider interpretations that come from the leading of the Spirit of God,

that creed is our guarantee of the liberty that is in Christ.

IV

Something remains to be said of the use of the creed, or of the creeds, in worship. There are some persons who, while recognising the need of a creed, yet find it an alien element in worship. Why in the midst of worship should we be called on to express our agreement with the articles of the creed?

I find it somewhat difficult to do justice to this attitude, because my own feeling to the creed in worship is of a fundamentally different character. To me the creed seems to lie at the very centre of common worship, the heart of which is the common allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Every great passion rests on a conviction of truth. There is no passion, no fighting power, in indifference to truth. Especially is this true of every great passion that is not merely individualistic but corporate, that expresses a common purpose and a common life. And Christianity is essentially such a corporate passion. Primitive Christianity

drew its power from a common allegiance, a common conviction of truth, and a common passion resulting from that allegiance. Thus it attacked the heathen world. The men who gave us the creeds were men who cared. When indifference reigns, Christianity is dead. In Chesterton's "The Ball and the Cross" two men, a Christian and an atheist, fall in love with each other because in an indifferent world they two seem to be the only men who care whether there be a God or no. The foe of Christ is indifference, a more insidious foe than open hostility. If the Church is to have power to-day it must revive that corporate passion for an attack on a world that is in tragic need of the truth as it is in Jesus.

The creed in worship is not a mere utterance of abstract doctrines. It is the badge of allegiance to Christ, a common allegiance expressing a common passion and a common purpose. It may be questioned if the creed has a place in private devotion. At any rate its supreme place is in the common worship of the Church, the Church united, voicing its allegiance to its Lord, and committing itself

to its common task of winning the world to Him. The creed is at the very heart of worship. It carries with it the thrill that belongs to the flag of one's country. It is the banner of our faith, the symbol of loyalty to the Captain of our salvation.

Viewed in this light the various clauses of the creed become full of meaning and of power. Consider some of them. The creed begins with the Name of God, not only the Name of Father, but of Father Almighty. On that Almightiness we depend, to it we appeal. In presence of a world in which armies and battleships seem to possess supreme power, in which mammon aspires to rule, in which sin asserts its dominion, we appeal to the Almightiness of the divine Fatherhood, to the supremacy of the power of love. That is the power that shall prevail. The kingdom of divine love is greater than the kingdom of this world. In that confidence we pledge our allegiance to the God whose power is revealed in the cross of loving sacrifice, whose Name of Father is manifested in His only Son, our Lord.

Then follows the majestic outline of the

gospel story. Our God is no distant Being. He has been given to us in human history, sharing our life, made real to us in our manifold experiences, entering into the depths of all that belongs to our humanity. Conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell. Those are mighty words, "He descended into hell." Whatever doubt there be as to their original meaning, they at any rate stand for this: there is no human experience that is remote from His, no depth of doubt or despair or sin that can take us out of the reach of the divine love. They are mighty words in time of trouble. There is no hell into which we can enter where we shall not find the Lord Christ. He has touched our human life at every point. And He has touched it with the power of victory. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. Therein is His victory already ours. And we look forward with joy and confidence to the final manifestation of that victory, when

He shall come to judge the quick and the dead, when His Kingdom shall be established in power, and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

I believe in the Holy Ghost. God is no distant Being, and He has not simply been revealed in the history of the past. He is in living contact with His world to-day. By that belief in the Holy Ghost our faith is no matter of the dead past. God is the living God. To that present and living God we appeal. He is manifested in His Holy Catholic Church. In Him is the Communion of Saints, the supreme fellowship of men, founded on the fellowship with God. From Him is the forgiveness of sins. And He is the source and pledge of a life that is beyond the power of death. And so we end with the triumphant words, I believe in the Resurrection of the body, and in the Life everlasting. And the Amen is the sign of our confidence in God's pledge. It is established. So be it. The truth stands firm. In that Amen we sum up our allegiance to the Master, our faith in the Father whom He has revealed, our con-

fidence in the victorious power of His Holy Spirit.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

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